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THE NEW EDUCATION

BY HANFORD HENDERSON

It is, on the whole, a salutary thing when a man is able, good-naturedly and decently, to laugh at himself once in a while, or even at his own class. It is quite mannerly, for example, for me to poke a little fun at old bachelors, at school-masters, at literary folk, at country people, at the leisure classes, at ritualists, at perfectionists and aristocrats, because I belong myself, happily, to all these amusing categories. This is not by way of saying that I mean to make merry over the vagaries of so serious a performance as the New Education, but only that on the same principle I feel that I may criticize it not ungraciously since I stand myself inside the movement, and have, in a very modest way indeed, done something to push it along.

And I am moved to make this criticism just at the present time because the New Education, it seems to me, has fallen headlong into a number of distressing pitfalls. Some of these were, I suppose, inevitable, (we learn to walk, do we not, by falling down?) but some of them, I am sure, could have been avoided had the movement taken itself a little less solemnly, had it measured in ounces rather than in hundred-weights some of our pet phrases and catch words, and above all had it allowed thought to play more freely and critically about some of our major premises.

I should not myself go so far as to say that at the present moment our precious New Education is more conspicuous for its faults than its virtues, but if some outsider said it, I should not perhaps,—if he said it nicely—be too severe upon him. As Bergson so wisely remarks, “Common sense is very fatiguing.” We started out, I think, with a genuinely common sense idea, namely that Education should be made real and vital. We wanted it to fit life. We wanted it to be something, not that a child could capriciously take or leave, but something so over-

whelmingly advantageous that no child could do without it. This laudable ambition has not yet been realized.

It is not my purpose to review all our regrettable vagaries, for they are far too numerous. I will content myself with the mention of two blunders, the one in secondary education, and the other in the college. I refer to the sophistries of school practice growing out of that phrase so dear to modernist ears, "the rights of the child," and to the incomplete and fragmentary culture which the colleges offer under the pseudo-liberalism of the Elective System. Both blunders, though separated by the deep chasm of college entrance requirements, have precisely the same root and are fairly typical of a considerable group of educational disasters. They grow out of an essentially false conception of the function of the teacher. He is made to blow a very uncertain blast on the educational trumpet and as a result both children and youth prepare themselves indifferently for the battle. The typical teacher in the New Education is so anxious to please, to placate, to interest, to make happy, to be tolerant, to be popular, that he stands, much like an upper servant or a cheap actor, ready to give whatever is asked for. He would never have had the backbone to drive the money-changers out of the Temple. He serves, in consequence, not the high ideals of character and scholarship, but the caprices, whimsies, prejudices, half-knowledge of children and youth and parents. This is an utterly impossible view of the office of the teacher, and brings him into deserved disaster and contempt. The one permissible view of that important office clothes it with authority. The teacher must be a leader. He must lead by virtue of wider knowledge and deeper insight. If he lacks this knowledge and this insight, it is an impertinence for him to teach. A reputable physician does not ask his patients what is the matter with them or what he shall do for them. He makes a careful diagnosis of the case and administers the indicated remedy. The patient may decline the treatment and in this event, any self-respecting physician simply withdraws from the case. An honest teacher must do precisely the same as an honest physician. It is emphatically a teacher's business to know what to do educationally, and loyally to do it, without consulting inexperienced

children or callow youth or less informed parents. And if his knowledge or competence be doubted, one has only to decline his services. When a teacher bids for the interest of his children, or for the support of their parents, he is morally lost and ready for any educational crime. If his methods be sound, he will ultimately win both the interest and the support, but they may not be made the immediate criterion.

It is an alluring phrase,—“the rights of the child”—but I, who love children, know that as many crimes are committed in its name as in the fair name of liberty. These abuses spring, I think, from the current confusion between rights and privileges. Children have few rights but in civilization they enjoy immense privileges. One might almost say that the measure of these child privileges is the measure of the civilization. But there is an immense difference between a right and a privilege. A right is inherent and self-contained, and may ask only a free field for realizing itself. In most cases, however, it must be confessed that our rights are more rhetoric than reality. It sounds wholly re-assuring to be told that we have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but after we have duly warmed ourselves in the glow of this fine phrase, and turn around to ask who is going to bestow such tremendous gifts we discover that the whole meaning was that no one may take them away from us. Rights would be most convenient investments if there were only some substantial home office that would honor their multitudinous coupons. But I cannot discover such a home office. When I prefer claims against individuals they are often good-naturedly and graciously met, but on reflection I find that in the majority of cases they are out-and-out gratuities and not genuine obligations. When I prefer such claims against society, I do an extremely futile thing, for society is a mere collective noun, not an entity that one may hail into Court.

I should like to remark parenthetically that a belief in rights has wrecked more human relationships than any other discernible cause. One is only free when one puts aside this mirage of rights and claims, and asks absolutely nothing for oneself. Then all the gracious and friendly acts which surround our daily lives appear in their true light as out-and-out gifts of the gods and one is

truly happy and grateful. If I demand nothing of my friend then all he gives me is a wonderful benefaction.

To one who has at last gained this freedom for himself it must seem highly unfortunate to surround childhood with an aureole of false claims and rights. Aside from the parents themselves there is no one to whom such claims may reasonably be addressed. Society did not invite the coming of the child, and made not the most remote promises in the way of maintenance and welfare. Even in the case of the parents the point must not be stressed too far. If we believe in immortality we must, I think, believe in it at both ends of the earth life, and must accept the view that the child sought incarnation, and was ready like the rest of us to meet a risky adventure. And while I would not willingly do anything to lessen the wholesome sense of parental responsibility, it is only fair to remember that in the great majority of cases the parents themselves were the somewhat blind agents of a powerful Life Force and not wholly the voluntary actors that older and more passionless and more reflective persons are disposed to picture them. The mere gift of life is in itself such a marvellous gift, that when one reflects upon it, and especially when one recalls that every mother who gives birth to a child puts her own life in serious jeopardy to do it, one is tempted to regard children as the real debtors and parents as the real creditors, and to esteem all the devotion and daily service which attend infancy and childhood and youth not as the satisfaction of juvenile "rights," but rather as a divine gratuity.

Believing as I do that the disinterested love of excellence is the one practical path of salvation, I should be the last to reduce morals to an economic basis, but this unwillingness must not blind me to the fact that money, as the symbol of human effort, never enters into a new relation without involving a moral issue. It is then pertinent to remember in this connection the utter economic dependence of children. Under the most favorable conditions imaginable it would be a very unusual child who could survive a twelve-month without both the care and the material support of the adult world. Happily for all concerned, the responsibility for this maintenance is gladly and generously assumed by parents or relatives or friends; even in case of necessity by the State. It

is, moreover, a service much to be desired, and those who have no children of their own are frequently moved to tempt fate by adopting them. But to keep the matter quite straight in our own minds we must not lose sight of the essential dependence. It extends to every detail of the physical life,—to food, shelter, clothing, all the long list of human needs—and passes from these to the varied and multitudinous necessities of the mind and spirit. In assuming this heavy responsibility, the adult world must also assume entire authority; or else it cannot in any effective way discharge the responsibility. It is as reasonable as it is just that those who grant privileges should determine both their nature and dimensions. Those of us who love children know how beguiling the little beggars are, or as our lady novelists still like to say, how intriguing, but the welfare which we want for the children can better be shaped by our own experience and maturity than by their utter inexperience and immaturity. It is worth remembering, too, that a spoiled child generally means a spoiled man.

A lively, imaginative boy often finds parental wishes and commands so altogether irksome that he is tempted into the open rebellion of direct disobedience. This is not necessarily a crime or even an ingratitude. I am myself very frank about it. I tell my own boys that if they want to run away and be sailors or cow-boys, trappers or explorers, they have just as much right to do so as a boy of a less adventurous spirit has to stop at home and study for holy orders. But,—and this is the point—they must play fair. Rebellion is only respectable when it is self-supporting. The officer who takes pay from the tyrant and fails to obey commands is plainly a traitor. He is a patriot only when he turns his back upon the loaves and fishes, and plays the game openly and above board. This very obvious loyalty is not, I think, made sufficiently clear to our children and young people. The boy who imagines that he can accept from his father food and clothing and shelter and equipment, social standing and consideration, and all the other good things of a prosperous life, and all the while disobey him either openly or in secret, is a poor sort of creature and ought to be made to see it. And the same is true of young men in college, and young girls in society. A little audacity, a little experimenting within the bounds of decency

will not hurt them, but a very little disloyalty introduces a veritable dry rot into the heart of things. This disloyalty is not only a base thing in itself but it leads to many of the larger infidelities of mature life.

There is such a wealth of sophistry in our adult world that it would be too much to expect children and youth to escape all share in it. While they are very young, and still have about them the aroma of another world, that touch of the divine which makes perfect childhood so adorable a thing, they may safely be left to their instincts. But morals grow frightfully confused when children come into the sentimental atmosphere of "the rights of the child"; when young people misinterpret "the right to live one's own life," and wobbly adults declare that "the world owes every man a living." There are mantras and sacred texts, which as every follower of the Path knows, have a genuine saving power, but these false phrases would seem to be the very seed of evil.

When we pass from the uncertain and fantastic world of child "rights" to the more secure world of child privileges, we are once more on firm ground. As Emerson and other wise men long ago expressed it,—all life *is* discipline. We are all of us educated, willy-nilly, by the unescapable events of the day. But the process is slow in time, costly in suffering, uncertain in results. If acting upon some theory of the childish right of choice we leave the child to discover the world for himself, to follow each day the line of childish least resistance as prompted by his own spontaneous interests, to exercise prematurely in childhood the liberty of choice proper to maturity, as extreme advocates of the New Education would have us think wise, we would indeed allow the child to educate himself, and there would be about this self-gained and self-directed education a certain rugged sincerity which is wholly admirable. But such an education would have grave defects, and those of us who are happily committed to a life of effort, to the way of the gods, must regard it as a lost opportunity. Compared to the more wisely directed and far broader culture of an older generation this cultivated spontaneity of our New Education yields a fragmentary and limited harvest. If it prevailed the world at large would enter upon

another retrogressive phase, and civilization would be a declining rather than an augmenting quantity. The events of the past few years have shown that civilization is not automatically progressive. It cannot be left to itself any more than a garden or an orchard can, but must be tended and advanced by the fidelity and devotion of each on-coming generation. As I have been pointing out, education, happily, is unavoidable; it comes in a natural form to children and adults alike. To live is to become educated, and the more fully and eagerly and disinterestedly we live, the more divinely do we become educated. We have here, I think, an indication of what all human attempts to further education ought to be,—they ought to be very clever, very subtle, very carefully devised attempts to lead children out of the narrow, restricted world to which their inexperience and ignorance consign them, into the immense and luminous world of those who intelligently seek perfection. To mis-state the cause of education and to affirm that children have the “right” to pursue their own limited aims in their own inadequate way, and that grown-ups are bound by some strange compulsion to lend a hand to the futility, is to surrender *in toto* the whole evolutionary process as a consciously directed human effort and to hark back to Nature. In certain moods all of us who go in for the New Education travel this road, and are ready quite savagely to throw over all schools and school-masters, and to give the children their head. But a single day’s uninterrupted converse with one of these “powerful, uneducated” persons is generally enough to dispel the mood, and to make us once more in love with the best sort of sophistication.

The childish “right” to be inadequate might logically stand if the children could fend for themselves, but even then it would carry no compulsion upon the adult world to lend a hand to the folly. Those who love children and who also love perfection regard education as an immense privilege, a boon which they have won partly through their own fidelity to high ideals, and partly as an out-and-out gift of the gods bestowed through the inscrutable channels of personal and racial heredity. And they would pass it on, these lovers of the divine, to the on-coming generation, not to satisfy any claims, not to meet any illusory rights, not even on their own part to discharge any self-assumed duty, but solely

for the sheer love of it, as a privilege whose dimensions must in the nature of the case be determined by the grantor, but whose ultimate significance will, it is hoped, be enlarged by the recipient. True teachers,—I omit, of course, the large class of mere pot-boilers—are bent upon precisely the same quest as their children are, the quest of a larger and more satisfying and more beautiful life, but they have presumably gone much further in the quest, have acquired a broader vision, and have won a greater command over ways and means. It is only fitting that they should lead and that the children should follow. It is true that this view of education throws everything upon the teacher, but that is unavoidable and is indeed the crux of the whole matter. If the blind lead the blind,—we all know what happens.

The motive of the New Education is sound, beautifully sound, and it will eventually win out in spite of the vagaries of its friends. It is in the application of the motive that one meets with a fatal lack of discrimination. This is vividly illustrated in the way in which extremists of the New Education handle the question of interest. It is a commonplace of elementary psychology that a man can only do what he wants to do, and that he will do it more effectively the more eager his desire. Education has properly seized upon this principle of interest, and given it a prominent place in modern educational methods. But this is a far cry from the blunder of the extremists in insisting that childish interests shall determine the *direction* of education. Childish interests are essentially fugitive, uncertain, transitory. It is a most unusual child who can occupy himself successfully and happily for a single day. A wise teacher will employ the principle of interest to the utmost, but it will always be as a *method*. He will determine in advance, and very definitely the *direction* in which the interest is to be aroused and expended. He will see that it is directed to some worthy end and not to some passing caprice.

A similar lack of discrimination is found in our colleges in the vagaries of the Elective System. As stated by its early friends and advocates, the Elective System was quite as alluring as “the rights of the child.” It seemed to sum up the rights of youth. But in practice it has proved equally illusory and even more harmful, since it has given us a generation of very partially

educated young people. The underlying thought is eminently sound and beguiled many of us into early advocacy. And we were further beguiled by the fervent advocacy of one of our most distinguished American educators. At its best, the underlying thought was that since life consists so largely in choosing among the multitudinous alternatives that destiny offers, it ought to be an essential part of education to teach youth to choose wisely. At its worst, the Elective System once more displaced interest from its legitimate rôle in psychological method, and made it the determining factor in the direction of effort. In a word, it encouraged a youth to follow the unprogressive line of his own limited, ready-to-hand interests instead of setting his heart and mind on fire by the revelation of those new and liberating and illuminating interests of which the mature custodians of culture in the college are the natural and qualified guardians. In brief, the Elective System permits a youth to follow the line of least resistance and applauds him for doing so. But no earnest student of the workings of the human spirit believes for one moment that such an effortless policy can carry a soul very far along the Path.

I am not forgetting that the Elective System, at its best, presupposes a competent adviser for each student who must officially sanction the course of study selected. But it has not been my own experience that this service is at all well rendered; and often it is completely nullified by the conflicting hours of our present ill-devised curriculum. I found one of my Harvard boys taking five languages, *and nothing else*; another lad whose head was so far in the clouds that he could not be trusted to do the simplest errand, was busying himself wholly with airy subjects admirably calculated to confirm him in his sins. And only the other day I found a bright young friend of mine, a sophomore at one of our excellent smaller universities enrolled for English, Latin, biology and biblical history,—no modern language, no mathematics, no fine arts, no modern social studies. (Happily his course has since been modified.) Everyone familiar with college life can call up similar examples. But it is not necessary to go into details,—one has only to examine the Elective System in its attitude towards any basal study, such as mathematics. It is

commonly and erroneously believed that mathematics requires some special aptitude and should not be pressed upon those who on first trial, or indeed without trial, express a distaste for the subject. In reality, mathematics requires no special aptitude, but it does require what many students are too lazy or too indifferent to give,—it requires accurate, quantitative thinking in place of loose, qualitative wool-gathering. So many of the values of life depend upon the quantitative element that the student who declines to think quantitatively can hardly be called educated.

It is a mistake, for example, to consider the calculus as meant only for engineers and physicists. As a matter of fact the calculus is for all of us who aspire to think at all, for it offers a new and fruitful way of thinking about quantity itself, and therefore in effect about life. One may not care to study Einstein in the original, or to go into all the intricacies of the Theory of Relativity, but since this Theory seems destined to take its place alongside of the older Newtonian Theory of Gravitation, and to modify it profoundly, it becomes necessary for every intelligent student, in order to be in any large sense intelligent, to be able to follow the general argument for Relativity, quite as necessary indeed as for every intelligent person to know the difference between the Ptolemaic and the Copernican astronomies. In a word, the quantitative element is an unescapable factor in all sound thinking and if we allow our young people to dodge it on the shallow ground that they have no turn for mathematics we open the door to all those current inaccuracies that make our modern life so complicated and so difficult.

I do not, for one moment, maintain the democratic thesis that all persons, or even all university students, can be made to think accurately, for I know only too well that the aristocrats of thought, as well as the aristocrats of manners and morals, have won their distinction as the fruit of long and patient self-discipline and effort, and I am under no illusion that the majority will pay so high a price. As Emerson so tersely puts it, "Men are as lazy as they dare to be." But it seems to me unfortunate that the official guardians of our culture, the universities, should have no definite and carefully-thought-out programme for making the thinking

of the whole student body more complete and more accurate. If education means anything, we older and better educated persons who have been over the ground ourselves, and who are now able to view life somewhat in the retrospect, ought to be able to formulate more perfect and more liberating courses of study for the on-coming generation than it can, in its large inexperience, formulate for itself. And we can then render the further service of a compact and time-saving scheme of hours.

Life means choice. So much depends upon wise choice,—happiness, prosperity, life itself—that one is tempted to class it as the major function. It should obviously be the major purpose of education to help youth choose aright. But when we place before youth the sealed packages of academic culture and require that he possess himself of five or six of them each year, we are not helping him to choose,—we are forcing him to guess, and as I have been pointing out, his guess is more likely than not to be unfortunate. Our more intelligent service would be to make him soundly acquainted with those varied aspects of life and thought which seem to our more mature vision to be most genuinely worth while, to open as many spiritual vistas as possible so that when he comes at manhood to face the major choices of life he shall have it in him to choose wisely. One need not be contemptuous of youthful wisdom, but neither may one properly assume a prescience which it cannot as yet possibly have attained. Callow youth is never so callow as when it is led prematurely to believe that it is not callow.

After having myself attended three great universities,—Pennsylvania, Zürich and Harvard,—and prepared many boys for entrance examinations, and watched their subsequent careers, I should, if called upon to choose between a rigid, prescribed course of study representing the mature wisdom of a scholarly faculty, and an elective course formulated by my own youthful immaturity, or with the questionable help of a casual college adviser, unhesitatingly accept the prescribed course. In order to emphasize this choice I have purposely used the offensive word *rigid*, but it goes without saying that a course of study may be prescribed without being rigid. In order to help out my own bewildered boys, floundering in the morass of the Elective Sys-

tem, I devised some years ago a general formula for the four years of undergraduate work, which for obvious reasons we named the *Balanced Course*. It provides six headings, six general terms representing the major departments of human culture; and under each heading there is given a list of special studies in their recommended sequence. Each semester or year, each general term is to be translated into an offered course of specific work. Such a frame-work of general terms prescribes a many-sided direction of undergraduate effort but in the specific work extends to each student the flexibility of individual choice. The six general terms are as follows:

1. The vernacular (English).
2. A foreign language (preferably one, pursued to the point of mastery).
3. Mathematics.
4. Science (a laboratory course).
5. Fine Arts (involving always some form of actual personal achievement).
6. Humanistic Studies.

An average boy following such a frame-work for the four undergraduate years, would in the end find himself possessed of at least the rudiments of an all-round education. The carefully arranged lists of special studies would offer him a sufficiently wide field for choice. They would also suggest helpful lines of subsequent reading and study, by calling his attention to the many interesting things that he does not yet know.

In all successful navigation of the seven seas, it is essential to have trustworthy charts. It is not a bad idea to provide them for the initial stages of the far more adventurous voyages of the human spirit. One may properly run risks in exploring the unknown, but it is a bit inglorious to suffer ship-wreck in sight of your own front-door.

HANFORD HENDERSON.